



Blue Sky News



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Skywire ready to begin roll-out

Significant activity representing a major step forward towards bringing a much-needed service to the area has taken place. Crews have been onsite for the past several weeks erecting six new towers needed to complete the 23 tower Skywire network that will bring high-speed internet access to unserved communities in the Blue Sky Region.



One of six new towers, St. Charles.

“These towers went up pretty quick, and the land owners have been great,” said Irwin Heshka, Operations Manager of W3Connex, who has coordinated the scheduling of the crews over the past few weeks. “It’s great to see this project move forward to the ‘build’ stage.” Heshka, a graduate of Canadore College, said that after more than a year of planning, the groups involved are ready to push into a more “tangible” aspect of the project.

Project Skywire, which received subsidy funding from Industry Canada will build the necessary infrastructure to allow residents in rural communities to access the Internet via a broadband connection. Phase one of the network is expected to be complete around spring of ‘05, with first customers online around Christmas in the East Ferris area. The group is pursuing additional funding to expand the network into the Almaguin Highlands and Killarney where communications deficits also exist.

“Industry Canada went over our engineering and financial plans in great detail. That level of scrutiny only helps us with any foreseeable pitfall or problems regarding the network. We’ve worked hard with Industry Canada Program Officers and I think I speak for us all when I say we have a great deal of confidence that this is going to help a lot of people,” said Heshka.

As Heshka and his team focus on the physical architecture of the Network, other activity with the project ramps up as well. Blue Sky Net, the Community Based Network who received the subsidy funds, along with W3Connex have met with interested parties regarding providing service over the network’s infrastructure. “As part of Industry Canada’s open-access policy, W3 will own the physical equipment but will be wholesaling access to Internet Service Providers who will package and deliver the service to the end user,” said Blue Sky Net Project Manager Scott Mannering. “The ISPs on board are now pinning down the technical and financial aspects of interconnect as well as the ‘customer care’ portion.”

Communications and marketing will also get into full swing as the service nears availability. “We really haven’t been pushing this a whole lot yet. Up to this point we’ve been dealing with a lot of logistics and not focusing on promotion. There is such demand for this out there that people have been doing such a good job keeping themselves in the loop. In the next month or so we will be getting the word out,” Mannering said, adding that Blue Sky Net will be holding the first of many town hall meetings next week to speak with communities about the benefits of the service.

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Skywire





Blue Sky Visitors Like to Fish (And they might bring their husbands along as well)

The Blue Sky Tourism Impact Study is nearly completed and the preliminary results provide some interesting clues about visitors to the Region.



Overnight recreational visitors to the Blue Sky Region are 44% more likely to participate in outdoor sports activities than the average overnight recreational visitor in other parts of Ontario. And not just any sports, Blue Sky visitors are much more likely to enjoy water sports (fishing, canoeing, boating, kayaking and swimming) or trail-oriented sports (snowmobiling, hiking, wildlife viewing, cross-country skiing, and cycling.)

If there is a message in the preliminary results, it is that the Blue Sky Region can successfully attract recreational visitors without investing in expensive infrastructure. Make sure that there is plentiful and easy access to the our beautiful waterways and that there is a well-developed trail structure and visitors will be happy.

While it isn't a surprise that Blue Sky visitors are five times more likely to fish, the data did provide a few surprises - at least from our point of view. For example, visitors to the region are 36% more likely to travel as families rather than as groups of adults when compared to the average Ontario traveler. If that's not a surprise, how about the fact that 50% of the Region's adult recreational visitors are female compared with 40% of recreational visitors in the rest of Ontario. Families and women? So much for the view of the region as a place where men come to fish or snowmobile with their buddies.

Another surprise is that the Region is much better than the rest of Ontario at attracting visitors in the shoulder months of May and September. So, while operators might be frustrated that they have empty rooms during the shoulder months, they should take comfort that there are far more empty rooms in other parts of the province.

While these results are preliminary, our work is starting to paint a picture that should help elevate the performance of the Region's tourism operators.

A Chance for your two cents

Attention all eager participants...The Blue Sky EGC is looking to the future with new goals and targets for our clusters (Forestry, Tourism, Building and Retirement Development, Municipal, Transportation, Retail, Agriculture, Mining, Technology and Telecommunications, Education and Training).

If you have any specific ideas for new projects please email them to: uyen.nguyen@blueskyregion.ca, and please make subject line read, "Cluster ideas/plan submission".



Results in Action

The Report on the 2004 Forum entitled 'A roadmap for the Ontario Forest Product Industry' is now available. The forum and report were made possible through the substantial support of FedNor. The contents of the report are a direct result of the ideas, input, and initiatives that emerged over the course of the forum and from the efforts of the participants of the event.

In order to meet the challenges identified at the forum head on, the Northeast Network of Community Futures Development Corporations suggested the creation of a Steering Committee. It was also agreed upon that the next logical step would be a "Roadmap" for the Ontario Forest Product Industry. The Steering Committee will be comprised of representatives from all segments of the forestry community and will be charged with the pursuit of a Roadmap for the forest products industry in Ontario.

For a copy of the report please go to: www.northeasternforestrycommunity.com



Water Regulations effect many in the region

A draft regulation has been posted to the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry to amend the Drinking Water Systems Regulation (O. Reg. 170/03) that will, if passed, extend the deadlines for some regulatory requirements.

These extensions, some of which are coming up at the end of December, will allow the ministry to continue its consultations with associations and others on options for making the regulation more workable for small communities and rural water systems.



In addition, the Advisory Council on Drinking Water Quality and Testing Standards, established in May 2004, has been holding public meetings in October and November as part of its review of regulatory requirements for small water systems. The Council's recommendations will be based in part on what it heard during those public meetings. Those recommendations would not be received in time to make regulatory amendments before key deadlines affecting many drinking water systems has already passed.

The proposed amendments can be found on the Environmental Registry posting, on the ministry's website: www.ene.gov.on.ca (click on EBR and search for "drinking water"). The deadline for comments is December 8, 2004. Questions about the amendments should be directed to Matt Uza, Senior Policy Advisor, at (416)314-7286.

Air Rally was a hit! And hope to return in 2005!

After many months of planning and coordinating efforts, on July 22nd 2004 the International Air Rally made it to North Bay. As hours of anticipation, and much cloud coverage and storm threats hindered the day, the International Air Rally participants and journalists from all over the globe made their way through the skies and landed at North Bay's Jack Garland Airport. Although it took about five hours to get them in... they landed! Due to weather restrictions, ten planes were held up in Amos, and not allowed to take off for North Bay, due to their need for better visual conditions. Forty pilots and journalists arrived and were entertained with many scheduled events.

Throughout the day there were several spectators, who had heard about the event on the radio that arrived at the Canadore Aviation campus to watch the landings and talk to the pilots. We were going to offer free plane rides, but unfortunately due to the poor weather conditions the pilots were unable to give public tours.

Once the last plane arrived, the sun finally showed and lifted spirits, which gave way to an evening of fun and laughter. Everyone enjoyed a delicious meal and great conversation at the Canadore Aviation Hanger, and then were whisked away to North Bay's waterfront where they enjoyed a ride on the Carousel and then a sunset cruise on the Chief Commanda II. Many of the pilots made positive comments about their visit to the area, and also mentioned that they look forward to maybe returning for another visit.

The organizers of the International Air Rally, were very impressed with the organization of this stop and have requested to have North Bay as the beginning location for the Air Rally next year. This would create more business for the area, as it would encompass three days here plus every team would be guaranteed to stay here, since it is the start. This year a few crews did not make it through to the North Bay leg of the Rally due to time commitments, but if North Bay were the official beginning point then we would be guaranteed maximum numbers and increased tourism revenue for the area.

With the numerous media personnel along for the rally, they take with them a piece of North Bay that they will be able to share with people from their homes, and if last year's media is a sample of what will come out for this year, then there will be plenty of media exposure for the region. Along with Newspaper and Magazine publications, we gave all of the Journalists a promotional DVD about the region, which they will use to promote our region.

The combination of this media will give us an estimated reach of 51 Million people internationally, and that is without the audience numbers from CTV, which will air a documentary about the rally.

Without question a significant economic impact of the event will be realized over time.



Local pilots Luc and Marc Charron pose with Mayor Fedeli, Susan Church and International Media.

Blue Sky Economic Growth Corporation

222 McIntyre Street W. Suite 350

North Bay, Ontario

P1B 2Y8

Phone: 705-476-0874 ext 215

Fax: 705-495-6038

Email: uyen.nguyen@blueskyregion.ca

*Mobilizing the Region
with a shared
economic vision.*

**We're on the Web!!
www.blueskyegc.ca**



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An update from Susan

The summer ended up being a very busy time around BSEGC. As we headed into August it was apparent that our Board needed to make decisions regarding the future of Blue Sky. I am happy to say that the Board of Director's overwhelmingly voted to continue the work with industry sectors to promote the vision of economic partnerships throughout the region.



One of the key messages from our funding partners is that they want to see that there is municipal support from across the region. In September I started to visit regional municipal Council meetings and also sent letters to each municipality requesting their support. To date, we have received commitments for funding support from 17 of 28 municipalities within the Blue Sky Region. Some Councils have yet to place our request on their agendas, but so far the support has been incredible. Thank you to all our municipal partners!

In late October I was invited to attend the Third National Rural Conference in Red Deer Alberta. Funded by the Rural Secretariat, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the conference was a wonderful opportunity to discuss rural economic issues with counterparts from all across Canada. A major focus of the conference was Community Capacity Building, Entrepreneurship, Infrastructure, Youth and Northern Issues. One constant emerging issue was the need for Broadband access. Blue Sky was recognized as a leader for our successful BRAND initiatives and as I talked about the need for connectivity in our communities here in the region, it became increasingly apparent how fortunate we are to be able to deliver our high-speed network to you.

At the beginning of the conference we were treated to an address by the Mayor of Red Deer, Gail Surkan. Interestingly enough, it was her last welcoming speech as she had decided not to seek re-election after several terms and was leaving office the next day following the municipal elections in Alberta. She underlined the importance of regional economic development and partnerships as she spoke about the Central Alberta Economic Partnership. She said, "Without all 41 communities around Red Deer coming together and working toward the same goals, we would never have *all* seen the success that we have". Ms. Surkin will continue as a Director of the CAEP and it is my hope to bring her to our Region for our next annual summit, so that you may have a chance to meet this very motivational and inspiring individual.

The Sky is definitely blue and there is much to look forward to. Blue Sky has some great projects planned for 2005 and as we near the end of yet another year, let us all work together for the future of our region!

Happy Holidays to you and yours and very best wishes for a healthy and prosperous New Year!

Susan



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